

TWO CURRENTS IN CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC THOUGHT

In his lenten pastoral for 1947, published in this country as *Growth or Decline? The Church Today*,¹ the venerable Cardinal Archbishop of Paris has focussed the attention of Catholics throughout of the world on the existence of two distinct and in some ways even divergent viewpoints within the Church today. Bishop Wright brought this same situation even more forcefully to the notice of American priests by his brilliant appreciation of Cardinal Suhard's book in last month's issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review*.² The question to which these divergent answers have been given is tremendously important. The fact that there are two opposite responses to this question is no less important.

The two distinct viewpoints described in Cardinal Suhard's pastoral are alternative resolutions of a problem presented to Catholics of our age. The two viewpoints are built around diverse opinions about the manner in which the Church as a whole and Catholics as individuals ought to react to what we may call the challenge of the new civilization. The technical and scientific progress of the last century, and particularly of the last two decades, has been such as to give a world-wide extension to certain attitudes quite out of harmony with the traditional Catholic mentality. Cardinal Suhard believes that one group of Catholics urges a predominantly "defensive" attitude with reference to the contemporary world-civilization. The other group is represented as seeking rather to "permeate" the world so as to bring about a new culture along Catholic lines. These men are convinced that the definitive modern mentality is now only in an emergent status, and that the completed product can be made a Catholic thing if sufficient Catholic contribution is brought into its making.

Cardinal Suhard insists that the basic problem demands a recognition of two distinct characteristics of the Catholic Church. This society is at once transcendent and human, superior to the vicissitudes of history and of human activity, yet bearing the marks of history upon itself. As the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth, the Church is an infallible and indefectible reality. No created agency will or can destroy it or make it cease to be the assembly of the

¹ The book was published this year by the Fides Publishers of South Bend and Montreal.

² Pp. 229 ff.

living God. But, because it is a living society of living men, this same Church manifests within itself certain definite characteristics which can be traced to individual civilizations and even to individual men.

The Cardinal warns his flock against two errors, both of which must be avoided if the problems of the present day are successfully to be solved. The first is the error of modernism, the second of "integralism." The true Catholic response to the problem of the day will avoid both of these tendencies. It will be the work, not of any one individual, but of the corps of Catholic scholars and workers in the apostolate. By reason of this synthesis, the Church will come to permeate every department of human life.

Taking cognizance of the two viewpoints, the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris deplores the resultant division among Catholics. The discussion itself is a good thing, since it manifests the interest of Our Lord's disciples in His Church. Nevertheless, the mutual opposition of the proponents of the two viewpoints can tend to prolong itself, and thus to constitute a scandal and a hindrance to the Church itself.

Cardinal Suhard's pastoral was addressed to the faithful of his own archdiocese. Hence he describes primarily the conditions and the opinions existent among his people. But, as Bishop Wright has pointed out, approximately the same conditions and precisely the same two viewpoints are to be found among our American Catholics today.

These two tendencies or attitudes are by no means new, even though certain individual problems may be peculiar to our own century. Fr. Edgar Hocedez, S.J., in his brilliant *Histoire de la theologie au XIX^e siècle*, points to a conflict between the forces of conservatism and those of a progressive tendency as one of the outstanding characteristics of Catholic thought during the reign of Pope Leo XIII.³ Those who are familiar with the literature of that period, as well as with the writings of the earlier portion of the nineteenth century, will have no difficulty in recognizing the two tendencies now manifest in American Catholic thought as the developments of attitudes which had come into existence during the previous century.

³ The third volume of this work, that which deals with the reign of Pope Leo XIII, was published last year by L'Edition Universelle at Brussels and by Desclée De Brouwer at Paris.

Since these two viewpoints are existent among us, and since the division so deplored by Cardinal Suhard can affect American Catholicism, it is certainly the business of our people to understand these two attitudes as clearly as possible. We must try to see if either of the two attitudes is wrong in itself, whether either or both can be abused, and whether there is any particular danger to be noted in the implications of either. The answers to these questions are very important and not too difficult to obtain.

In the first place, it is clear that neither of these tendencies or viewpoints, as it exists in itself, is objectively reprehensible. Neither militates directly against fidelity to Our Lord, to His Church, and to His teachings. The first attitude, the one usually designated as "conservative," centers around a zeal for Catholic orthodoxy. The men and the writings that embody this viewpoint act primarily to preserve the accurate presentation of divine revelation in current teaching by members of the true Church. They enter into polemic only in order to indicate and reprove what they regard as incorrect or misleading expositions of the Catholic message.

Certainly there is nothing in any way objectionable in this purpose, and nothing reprehensible in the attitude governed by it. In itself, an inaccurate presentation of the divine message is one of the most lamentable evils in the world. It is an evil thing to hand out, as the authentic teaching of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church, some body of doctrine which is in reality only a perversion or a mutilated form of that teaching. The school of Catholic writers which sets itself against this evil is manifestly worthy of commendation.

But, on the other hand, the "progressive" viewpoint in modern Catholic writing is likewise blameless in itself. It is certainly the business of the Church and the responsibility of Catholics as individuals to see to it that the truth of Jesus Christ is presented to mankind as effectively as possible. Catholics would be recreant to their duty were they to allow any disaffection for what are termed modern methods of learning or the modern findings of true science to stand in the way of an active and efficacious manifestation of Catholic truth to the world. It is surely the business of the Catholic to strive to influence as many people as possible to love and to be guided by the truth of Jesus Christ.

Basically, that is the purpose underlying the "progressive" viewpoint among loyal and intelligent Catholics. This attitude reacts

against a slipshod presentation of Our Lord's message. It is opposed to the substitution of apocryphal, albeit "pious," stories, and accounts of private revelations, for the content of Catholic dogma in the works of some Catholic publicists. It insists upon the best possible presentation of Our Lord's teaching to the men and women He died to save. Essentially, then, this "progressive" attitude is a good thing. In itself, it does not call for any polemic against the men of "conservative" tendency. Indeed, for proper Catholic writing and preaching in our own day, both of these viewpoints are equally necessary.

Cardinal Suhard's pastoral speaks of the viewpoint opposed to that of the progressives as "defensive" in character. We must remember that this attitude, however, involves no lack of zeal for the propagation of the faith. Actually the desire to preserve the purity of the Catholic faith in all of its integrity and perfection in no way militates against a zeal for Catholic missionary activity. Quite the opposite is the case. Catholic dogma describes the Church as an organization which by its very nature, by reasons of its very principle of unity and being, necessarily seeks to bring new members into its fold in order to unite them with God. An aloofness from the world, in the sense of a lack of anxiety to spread the kingdom of Christ upon earth, is in no way characteristic of the men whose attitude in the religious discussions of the day is motivated primarily by a zeal for orthodoxy.

There is such a thing as a religious attitude which seems to abandon any concern for the welfare of the general mass of mankind. We see this attitude set forth in the manifesto of the "Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerites)," one of the smaller Mormon subdivisions. The report of this group, printed in the account of the religious census for 1936, state that "Missionaries were not necessary as the gentiles had already rejected the Gospel and, when the Gospel goes to the world again, it will go to the Jews to the convincing of nations."⁴ Obviously this attitude has nothing whatsoever in common with the viewpoint of any Catholic group. Yet, unfortunately, all too many descriptions of the "conservative" viewpoint in documents of a "progressive" provenance seem to imply that the Catholic who is primarily interested in orthodoxy has adopted an attitude quite similar to that of the Cutlerites.

⁴ In *Religious Bodies: 1936* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), II, 835.

But, we must not forget that both the "conservative" and the "progressive" attitudes can be twisted and rendered dangerous to the intellectual well-being of our Catholics today. Cardinal Suhard speaks of Modernism and integralism as two dangers which we must avoid if we are to bring about an accurate and effective presentation of Catholic truth to the modern world. The first is definitely an abuse or corruption of the "progressive" viewpoint. The second is described as an undesirable development of the "conservative" attitude.

An incautious reader of Cardinal Suhard's pastoral might possibly come to the dangerously false conclusion that Modernism and integralism, as we know them, are two contrary false doctrines, the one, as it were, to the left, and the other to the right, of genuine Catholic teaching. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth. Modernism, in the technical language of Catholic doctrine, is the name applied to the definite series of errors condemned in the decree *Lamentabili sane exitu*, in the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, and in the *motu proprio*, *Sacrorum antistitum*. Pope Pius X spoke of Modernism as "a conglomeration of all the heresies."⁵

Integralism, on the other hand, is essentially the teaching or the attitude of those who worked for the presentation of an integral Catholicism, of Catholic dogma set forth accurately and in its entirety. Most frequently the name of integralism was applied to the doctrine and the viewpoint of those Catholic writers who entered into controversy against the Modernists during the first decade of the present century. Understood in this fashion, integralism was nothing else than the contradiction of heretical Modernism. It was thus basically only the exposition of Catholic truth.

When we see that integralism is set off with Modernism in Cardinal Suhard's pastoral letter as a position to be avoided by Catholics, we must not forget that there were certain happenings of a primarily national interest in France which have motivated this terminology. Some of the French writers who had been most active in their opposition to the Modernist errors were themselves ultra-conservative in the field of politics. Many of these men were implicated in or connected with a definite royalist movement. Since some of these specifically political views were unfortunate, the men

⁵ In the *Pascendi*, n. 39. Cf. *Codicis iuris canonici fontes* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1933), III, 713.

who supported them brought a certain amount of discredit upon their doctrinal attitudes, and caused the name of integralism to be stretched to cover fields quite distinct from that which it originally served to designate.

Nevertheless, we must not forget the fact that Modernism, as such, is a definite heresy or collection of heretical teachings, while integralism, as such, is nothing of the sort. The true Catholic teaching is not going to be found at any half-way point between the teachings of such as Tyrrell and Loisy and the doctrines of the Catholic authors who opposed them. In opposing the dicta condemned in the *Lamentabili*, the *Pascendi*, and the *Sacrorum antisitum*, the great Catholic authors of a generation ago were perfectly justified. If, as is usual in our own country, the name of integralism is applied to this specifically anti-Modernistic teaching, then integralism is nothing more than a statement of Catholic truth, implied in a denial of errors which are incompatible with the divine message of the Catholic Church.

This does not mean, of course, that every theory advanced by the great opponents of Modernism during the first decade of our century has to be accepted as Catholic doctrine. Still less does it imply that any of these individual positive opinions could rightly be termed as belonging to the essence of integralism. The men who recognized and denounced the false teachings current in certain quarters around the turn of the century differed rather sharply from one another on individual theological conclusions. The points on which they differed, and on which the men of their time might legitimately differ, did not constitute the reality which the Modernists at least knew as integralism. The work of the integralists as a group was the unmasking and the destruction of the Modernist heresy. It is this common work, and no other, which was and which still is rightly and commonly designated as integralism.

For our own country, then, it is at best confusing to indicate integralism as a danger which Catholic publicists must avoid if they are to present an active and effective statement of divine revelation to the world which needs this teaching so badly. Modernism very definitely is a danger. It is a pitfall into which a careless man might stumble if he were so concerned for the "progressive" viewpoint, so anxious to present the Catholic Church *effectively* to the world, that he had come to forget the essential constituents of Catholic dogma. Integralism, as such, is not a pitfall at all. Quite another

thing is the danger that threatens a conservative writer, zealous for the integral preservation of the Catholic faith, yet careless about the effectiveness of his own presentation of the Catholic message.

The danger from this quarter is that of writing or preaching the divine and supremely vital message of the Church in an unintelligible fashion. The men who succumb to this danger, and who thus destroy the value of their own efforts for the Church, are content to express themselves in what amounts to merely a somewhat crass transliteration of Latin dogmatic or theological texts. They speak in commonplaces which were once vital and interesting to hearers and readers of our language, but which have become thought-extinguishing catchwords to the men of our own time. They are inclined to be men of one book, alertly ready to parrot out the conclusions of one theological manual, without any regard for the fact that no one seminary text can give or hope to give a complete picture of the teachings they are privileged and commissioned to impart to the world.

The most serious evils which threaten the intellectual lives of our people, however, come from the abuse of the progressive viewpoint rather than from a perversion of the conservative attitude. The progressive is concerned primarily with the idea of presenting the Catholic doctrine effectively to the people of our age. He must always be on the alert against the temptation to modify the Catholic teaching or to leave out some of its essential constituents so as to make it appear more acceptable. The world, using the term in its basic theological sense, as the congregation basically opposed to the kingdom of God on earth, has always shown a definite hospitality to deformations of the Catholic doctrine. The history of Modernism, with its account of the sympathy given to the teachings of the Modernists by those outside the fold, is only one example of this tendency. A great deal of the Catholic Church's teaching would be highly acceptable to the world, if it were presented other than what it really is, the one divine and supernatural public revelation which is necessary for all men because God Himself has raised mankind to a supernatural destiny. The Catholic Church itself would be quite a popular institution were it not for the fact that it insistently proclaims itself for what it really is, the society of Christ, necessary to all men for salvation.

The crass Modernism of the early days of this century does not represent any immediate threat. The teaching condemned by Pope

Pius X was so manifestly a contradiction of Catholic dogma that no one could slip into it under the impression that he was forwarding the welfare of the Church. But, in attempting to popularize the presentation of Catholicism in a world impregnated with secularism, it is possible for a well-meaning progressive to adopt the false tactics of "adaptation" or of "minimizing."

Because the secularist is exclusively concerned with this world, there is always the danger that an over-zealous and under-instructed Catholic apologist may fall into the danger of leaving out the supernatural and other-worldly content of Catholic teaching when he appeals to the modern mentality. In his *Testem benevolentiae*, Pope Leo XIII expresses himself strongly on the tactic of presenting the Catholic message without including those elements which may appear to be opposed to modern tendencies.

Pope Leo's words on this subject are of tremendous importance to theologians of our own day. He is speaking of certain "new opinions," against which he deems it his duty to protest "in order to provide for the integrity of the faith, and to guard the security of the faithful." ⁶

The principles upon which the new opinions we have mentioned are based may be reduced to this: that, in order the more easily to bring over to Catholic doctrine those who dissent from it, the Church ought to adapt herself somewhat to our advanced civilization, and, relaxing her ancient rigor, show some indulgence to modern popular theories and methods. Many think that this is to be understood, not only with regard to the rule of life, but also to the doctrines in which the deposit of faith is contained. For they contend that it is opportune, in order to work in a more attractive way upon the wills of those who are not in accord with us, to pass over certain heads of doctrines, as if of lesser moment, or so to soften them that they may not have the same meaning which the Church has invariably held. On that point the Vatican Council says: "The doctrine of faith which God has revealed is not proposed like a theory of philosophy, which is to be elaborated by the human understanding, but as a divine deposit delivered to the Spouse of Christ to be faithfully guarded and infallibly declared. . . . That sense of the sacred dogmas is to be faithfully kept which Holy Mother Church has once declared, and is not to be departed from under the specious pretext of a more profound reasoning." ⁷

⁶In The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1903), p. 442.

⁷*Ibid.*

The "softening" of doctrine to which Pope Leo referred comes as an inevitable consequence of the system of "minimizing." Originally a man was supposed to "minimize" Catholic dogma legitimately if, to avoid making undue difficulties for prospective converts or for educated Catholics of extraordinary sensibility, he set forth the least possible amount of dogma consistent with divine truth. The term itself was always a source of trouble, since the preaching of Catholic truth was never anything to be judged in terms of either a minimum or a maximum. As the ambassadors of Christ, it is our business to see, not how much or how little we can preach as divinely revealed. It is our affair to see to it that our teaching is exactly and only what Our Lord has prescribed for us in and through His Church.

Pope Leo has given, in the *Testem benevolentiae*, a teaching upon which the necessary reconciliation of the two viewpoints mentioned in Cardinal Suhard's pastoral must be based. He insists upon the effective preaching of the entire Catholic message. Above all, he stresses the fact that men must be brought to Our Lord only in the way which He has prescribed.

Far be it, then from any one to diminish or for any reason whatsoever to pass over anything of this divinely revealed doctrine. Whoever would do so would rather wish to alienate Catholics from the Church than to bring over to the Church those who dissent from it. Let them return; indeed nothing is dearer to Our Heart; let all those who are wandering far from the sheepfold of Christ return; but let it not be by any other road than that which Christ has pointed out.⁸

Pope Leo spoke of one effect of false doctrine upon the Church of Christ. He said that such teaching would tend to drive Catholics out of the Church rather than to bring new converts into the fold. He thus adverted to the fact that heresy, considered not merely as a sin but as a teaching, has ever been the cause of schism, of disunity in the company of Christ. The unity among Catholics which he desired and which is the result of Christ's prayer for His Church comes only in and through the true presentation of the divine revelation.

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⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 443.